

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 11421

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E O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PDEV, UK, RH
SUBJECT: RHODESIA: GRAHAM-LOW MEETING WITH OWEN

1. GRAHAM AND LOW BRIEFED FOREIGN SECRETARY OWEN AND OTHER SENIOR FOREIGN OFFICE OFFICIALS ON JULY 11. GRAHAM SAID HE BELIEVED IAN SMITH MIGHT BE READY FOR A SETTLEMENT BUT THAT NKOMO'S POSITION ON LAW AND ORDER WAS UNREALISTIC. SMITH HOWEVER HAD NOT RULED OUT A MEETING BETWEEN RHODESIAN AND NATIONALIST MILITARY COMMANDERS TO DISCUSS SECURITY ISSUES. LOW DESCRIBED THE APPARENT PLEASURE OF THE RHODESIAN AUTHORITIES WITH THE PATRIOTIC FRONT'S INTRANSIGENT ANNOUNCEMENTS AND RHODESIAN EXPECTATIONS THAT THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP WOULD CONTINUE ITS WORK WITHOUT THE COOPERATION OF THE PATRIOTIC FRONT.

2. OWEN BELIEVES THE WILLINGNESS OF RHODESIAN MILITARY LEADERS TO TALK WITH THEIR NATIONALIST COUNTERPARTS COULD BE SIGNIFICANT. THROUGHOUT THE CONVERSATION HE RETURNED TO THIS POINT, EMPHASIZING THAT AN ACCOMMODATION BETWEEN SOLDIERS COULD OBVIATE THE NEED OF AN OUTSIDE FORCE. WITHOUT UK CABINET SUPPORT, A COMMONWEALTH FORCE IS NOW UNLIKELY TO GET OFF THE GROUND, HE SAID, AND A UN
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FORCE WOULD PROBABLY BE UNMANAGEABLE AND UNACCEPTABLE TO BOTH BLACKS AND WHITES IN RHODESIA. IF NKOMO COULD STRIKE A DEAL WITH SMITH, THE ZAPU LEADER WOULD IN ANY CASE WANT THE RHODESIAN ARMY TO REMAIN INTACT IN ORDER TO PROTECT HIMSELF FROM HIS RIVALS.

3. OWEN ALSO ATTACHED SIGNIFICANCE TO SITHOLE'S RETURN

TO RHODESIA. WITH MUGABE FADING POLITICALLY, SITHOLE AND NKOMO MIGHT WORK OUT AN ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THEN COME TO TERMS WITH SMITH. BRITAIN WOULD THEREFORE NOT BE CALLED ON TO PLAY MORE THAN A FIGUREHEAD ROLE DURING THE TRANSITION. TO ENTER INTO SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT, HOWEVER, NKOMO WOULD NEED TO FEEL ASSURED THAT HE WOULD EMERGE VICTORIOUS FROM WHATEVER ELECTIONS FINALLY TOOK PLACE. LOW AND GRENNAN QUESTIONED WHETHER AN NKOMO-SITHOLE ALLIANCE WAS A REALISTIC EXPECTATION, AND OWEN STRESSED THAT ANY "INTERNAL OPTION" THAT EXCLUDED THE PATRIOTIC FRONT COULD NOT BE SUPPORTED BY THE US OR THE UK.

4. OWEN SAID THAT HE HAD IN THE PAST ARDENTLY PUSHED A FAST TIMETABLE FOR REACHING A RHODESIA SETTLEMENT. NOW, HE SAID, WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS LAST ROUND OF CONSULTATIONS. NEW POSSIBILITIES MIGHT EMERGE IN THE MEANTIME, AND THESE CAN BE DISCUSSED WHEN HE VISITS WASHINGTON ON JULY 22. COMMENT: OWEN AND THE FOREIGN OFFICE ARE ONLY JUST BEGINNING TO ASSESS THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP'S LATEST EFFORTS. OWEN WAS PARTICULARLY DOWNHEARTED THAT HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE FULL CABINET HAVE FAILED TO SHARE HIS ENTHUSIASM FOR A VIGOROUS BRITISH ROLE IN A RHODESIA SETTLEMENT.

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